

# PATIENT NOTES

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For Veteran Patients

March 2003

## **DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE...** "We are proud to provide our veterans the best possible care."

The past year has been full of Medical Center reports and reviews, periods of unrest and uncertainty, but all in all growing times, most of which have been rewarding. We completed fiscal year-end reports and met the budget, both within guidelines. Meeting the budget meant concerted cooperation in reducing spending, particularly pharmaceutical costs. We are proud to have exceeded our Medical Care Cost Recovery (billing insurance companies) goals by \$1,452,102. We exceeded federal procurement standards relating to small business, minority, and women contractors. We exceeded most of the Capitol Network's performance measures, particularly patient waiting times.

Martinsburg continues to lead our Capitol Network with the lowest lost-time work claim measures and was one of the first Network facilities to be fully operational with electronic medical record, clinical reminders, and Bar Code Medication Administration (BCMA). Our Nuclear Medicine Service was recognized as a "Center of Excellence," and we have completed our Laboratory Service review by the College of American Pathologists, along with the Compensated Work Therapy Program & Community Based Outpatient Clinic laboratory accreditation reviews, all receiving full accreditation with no recommendations. Most recently, we completed the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) accreditation visit, and we are exceedingly pleased with the excellent results:

Hospital Accreditation Program - 95%;  
Long Term Care Program - 98%  
Behavioral Health (Mental Health Service Line) - 99%  
Home Medical Equipment - 97%.

These scores exemplify the high level of care that is provided by the Martinsburg VA Medical Center.

We are indeed proud of our numerous achievements, and as we look back on our many accomplishments and the thousands of veterans who have benefited from our health care services, we are gratified. As we progress through 2003, we remain committed to providing our patients with the best possible health care that can be found anywhere. Each day we will strive to honor the veterans who receive care at the Martinsburg VA Medical Center for all they have done to preserve the freedom that we enjoy.

Bless you for your service and keep our nation and leaders in your prayers.

GEORGE M. MOORE, JR.  
Medical Center Director

*"Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success."*  
- Henry Ford

## **VISN 5 CARES MARKET**

Simply stated, CARES (Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services) is a realignment study to objectively evaluate the best ways to provide high-quality health care services to more veterans in more locations during the next 20 years.

VA needed a new way to address projected changes in veteran population —their locations and medical needs – and to continue to bring VA's health care system into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. CARES will help VA to be a better steward of its assets, make better use of existing space and realign resources to better meet the needs of veterans.

We are now in step four of the nine-step CARES process – development of Market Plans. In late November, Planning Initiatives for the three markets within the VA Capitol Health Care Network (VISN 5) were identified. Planning initiatives are the gaps between the services we provide now and the projected services we will need to provide in the future. Some of the major gaps identified in VISN 5 include: inpatient demand and outpatient demand, including subspecialty areas. Plans to address the gaps for each market area will be developed after considering the input we receive from our stakeholders (patients, employees, unions, veterans service organizations and congressional representatives). We will also be working with all parts of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Defense and our affiliates in preparing Market Plans. CARES Market Planning Teams have been conducting briefings with stakeholders throughout the Network.

Throughout the CARES process, veterans, VA employees, unions, veterans service organizations, academic affiliates and elected officials will be involved through briefings and solicitation of comments. To provide input or obtain more information about the CARES planning process for the VA Capitol Health Care Network, please contact the VISN 5 CARES Hotline at 1-800-463-6295, ext. 7384 or send an e-mail to the VISN 5 CARES Help Desk at: [VISN5CARESHelpDesk@med.va.gov](mailto:VISN5CARESHelpDesk@med.va.gov). Please make sure to leave your name, phone number/address and your questions/comment about the CARES planning process when contacting us. VISN 5 CARES information and updates are available at [www.va.gov/visn5/network/cares.htm](http://www.va.gov/visn5/network/cares.htm).

## **JCAHO ACCREDITATION**

The Martinsburg VA Medical Center was surveyed by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) the week of November 13-15, 2002. The Medical Center successfully met the requirements for continued accreditation and received the following official scores: Hospital Accreditation Program (HAP) received 95%; Behavioral Health/Mental Health Program received 99%; Long Term Care Program received 98% and Home Medical Equipment received 97%. This excellent report is a result of a tremendous joint effort and the Medical Center Director praised employees and volunteers. As a facility, Martinsburg has continued to prove itself to be dedicated to quality patient care.

The Joint Commission evaluates and accredits more than 17,000 health care organizations and programs in the United States. An independent, not-for-profit organization, JCAHO is the nation's predominant standards-setting and accrediting body in health care.

JCAHO accreditation is recognized nationwide as a symbol of quality that reflects an organization's commitment to meeting certain performance standards. To earn and maintain accreditation, an organization must undergo an on-site survey by a JCAHO survey team at least every three years.

## **NEW MRI IN SERVICE**

The Martinsburg VA Medical Center recently had a new, state-of-the-art MRI installed. Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) is a sophisticated imaging technique to produce unparalleled, high quality images inside the human body. Martinsburg's MRI equipment is the Phillips Intera 1 Tesla Magnet, which is the largest selling magnet worldwide and provides state-of-the-art technology and techniques. The Phillips Intera is capable of neurological, orthopedic, cardiovascular and whole body scanning. Because of the short bore magnet, the patient is not as confined in the long tunnel of some MRIs.

## **MOBILE CLINICS DISCONTINUED**

After a thorough review process by the VA Capitol Health Care Network, the decision was made this past fall to discontinue the two mobile clinics operated by VISN 5. One of the mobile clinics was utilized by the VA Maryland Health Care System and the other was shared between the VA Medical Centers in Washington, DC and Martinsburg, WV. The mobile clinics were used to help increase veteran enrollment throughout the Network, in addition to offering VA health care services and screenings to veterans in rural areas.

During the review process, it was determined that space limitations, travel requirements, lack of consistent computer access, repair and maintenance downtimes and high operating costs associated with the number of veterans treated were limiting the effectiveness of the mobile clinics. Since the mobile clinics were first introduced, several new community based outpatient clinics have been opened throughout the VA Capitol Health Care Network to better serve veterans in rural areas and in locations far from existing VA medical centers. The opening of these new outpatient clinics, in addition to the findings of the review process, indicated that the mobile clinics were no longer necessary and that the resources expended on their care and maintenance could be redirected throughout VISN 5 to support other veteran programs and services.

Throughout the review process of the mobile clinics, the VA Capitol Health Care Network worked with all concerned stakeholders to keep them informed of the outcomes and to involve them in any follow-up action plans.

## **LONG TERM CARE CO-PAYMENTS**

There have been some problems with computer software that generates bills for patients who are in our nursing home. If you have a question about a bill you receive from this VA Medical Center, please contact Pam Comstock, 304-263-0811, Ext. 3199.

## **MCCR EXCEEDS COLLECTION GOALS**

The Martinsburg VA Medical Center exceeded the fiscal year 2002 collection goal by more than one million dollars and achieved a level of 51.85% of billable amounts collected due to the efforts of the Medical Care Cost Recovery (MCCR) staff. The Medical Care Collection Fund (MCCF) goal of 6,799,984 was established at the VISN level and is a critical part of the budget allocated to the medical center. VISN 5 was the first Network in the nation to meet and exceed its FY 2002 collection goal.

The MCCR Section at the Martinsburg VA Medical Center is organizationally aligned under the Business Programs and Operations Service and is responsible for the majority of the MCCF activity core functions. These functions include insurance identification, pre-registration, insurance verification, utilization review (to include pre-certification, certification and continued stay reviews), outpatient coding, bill generation of all bill types, claims, follow-up correspondence and inquiries, payment processing, Regional Counsel referrals and appeals.

The VISN 5 Consolidated Pre-registration Unit and the Insurance Verification Unit are located at the Martinsburg VA Medical Center. The Pre-registration Unit, implemented in October 1998, is responsible for conducting pre-registration calls for all medical centers within VISN 5. The Insurance Verification Unit, implemented in July 2000, is responsible for insurance verification of new insurance cases identified by the Pre-registration Unit for all medical centers within VISN 5. Martinsburg also has its own unique Coding/Billing Unit. The Medical Record Technicians in the Coding/Billing Unit are responsible for the coding/validating/billing of all outpatient MCCF cases.

## **VA WEB ADDRESSES**

Veterans can access benefits and health care information 24 hours a day, seven days a week on the VA website at [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) or the local website at [www.va.gov/visn5](http://www.va.gov/visn5).

## **VA BUDGET**

“The President’s budget request for \$63.6 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs demonstrates the administration’s commitment to this nation’s veterans,” said Secretary Principi in a message accompanying the release of the budget proposal. He said the fiscal year 2004 budget request for VA represents the greatest percentage increase for any department in government. The budget proposal, \$30.2 billion in discretionary funding (mostly for health care) and \$33.4 billion for VA-administered entitlement programs (mostly disability compensation and pensions for veterans), underscores VA’s commitment to serve the highest priority veterans, those with service-connected disabilities, low-income veterans and veterans with special medical needs.

The Secretary said the President’s budget would increase the number of higher priority veterans in VA care by 169,000 in FY 2004. “We expect to treat 4.8 million patients in FY 2004, while continuing to reduce the time veterans must wait to see a doctor,” he said. “Our goal is to have veterans wait no more than 30 days for a non-emergency, primary care visit.”

The budget proposal also builds upon efforts to reduce the backlog of claims from veterans waiting to receive benefits, especially disability compensation and pensions. “I expect,” said Principi, “that by the end of this fiscal year on October 1, veterans will wait an average of 100 days for a decision on their claims.” He said that the \$144 million requested in the budget for VA’s national cemeteries will permit the department to fulfill this nation’s promise to provide veterans with dignified final resting places in facilities that are, truly, national shrines.

## **SECRETARY PRINCIPI ANNOUNCES CHANGES IN ENROLLMENT**

On January 17, 2003, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi announced his decision to suspend additional enrollments for veterans with the lowest statutory priority. This category includes veterans who are not being compensated for a military-related disability and who have higher incomes. The enrollment decision was made in order to ensure VA has the capacity to care for its core group of veterans-

those with service-connected disabilities, low-income veterans and those with special health care needs like veterans who are blind or have spinal cord injuries.

The suspension of enrollment affects only veterans in Priority Group 8, the lowest group in VA’s eight-level system for setting health care priorities, who have not enrolled in VA’s health care system by January 17, 2003. Priority Group 8 veterans already enrolled will be “grandfathered” and allowed to continue in VA’s health care system.

Work is underway with the Department of Health and Human Services to determine how to give Priority Group 8 veterans aged 65 or older who cannot enroll in VA’s health care system access to the “VA+Choice Medicare” plan. The plan calls for VA to participate as a Medicare+Choice provider. Eligible veterans would be able to use their Medicare benefits to obtain care from VA. In return, VA would receive payments from a private health care plan contracting with Medicare that would cover costs. The “VA+Choice Medicare” plan would become effective later this year as details are finalized between VA and the Department of Health and Human Services.

VA has been unable to provide all enrolled veterans with timely access to health care services because of the tremendous growth in the number of veterans seeking VA health care. More than half of all new enrollees have been in Priority Group 8. Non-service disabled, higher income veterans accounted for the majority of the rapid enrollment growth, hindering the ability of VA to care for the service-disabled, low-income veterans and those with special needs. Even with the suspension of new enrollments for Priority Group 8 veterans, another 380,000 veterans in Priority Groups 1 through 7 are projected to enroll by the end of FY 2003.

“Last year, VA treated 1.4 million more veterans with 20,000 fewer employees than in 1996,” said Principi. “Nonetheless, VA leads the nation in many important areas like patient safety, computerized patient records, telemedicine, rehabilitation and research. I not only want to see this standard continue, I intend to see it get even better.” Questions about enrollment or eligibility at the Martinsburg VA Medical Center can be referred to 304-263-0811, Ext. 3757 / 3758; after 4:30 p.m., Ext. 3050.

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## CHANGES IN ENROLLMENT CONTINUED

### *What Veterans Should Know*

- Veterans are still eligible to receive care at no cost to them for:
  - their service-connected conditions,
  - conditions related to military sexual trauma,
  - conditions relating to exposure to Agent Orange, ionizing radiation, or environmental contaminants, or
  - head or neck cancer related to nose or throat radium treatment while in the military
- Veterans with a permanent, severely disabling injury or condition that compromises their ability to carry out the activities of daily living and requires use of personal or mechanical assistance to leave home or bed or requires constant supervision to avoid physical harm, may be determined to be catastrophically disabled and placed in Priority Group 4.
- VA will provide medical care on a humanitarian basis for veterans who cannot be enrolled but who require immediate treatment. Please note, VA must charge usual and customary fees for such care.
- Veterans who served in combat locations can receive health care for conditions potentially related to their service for two years after release from service.
- Contact the Martinsburg VA Medical Center, Patient Eligibility, 304-263-0811, Ext. 3757/3758, to see if you may qualify for these exceptions.

### *What Veterans Can Do If They Disagree With This Decision*

Follow the instructions on VA Form 4107VHA, "Your Rights to Appeal Our Decision." The Notice of Disagreement should be delivered to the Enrollment Coordinator at your local VA health care facility. While the Enrollment Coordinator cannot reverse the Secretary's decision about Priority Group 8's, the Coordinator will personally review your concerns and determine if you qualify for enrollment or care under any exceptions. If we cannot rule in your favor, you will be provided a Statement of the Case, which will describe the facts and laws associated with the determination of your case.

## VA Urges "Thank You" Signatures

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi has urged Americans to sign a special "Thank You Note" to the men and women of the U.S. Military. The note is available on the Internet at a site—[www.defendamerica.mil](http://www.defendamerica.mil)—maintained by the Department of Defense.

"Whether deployed to the Middle East, serving shipboard in the Indian Ocean or supporting operations at hundreds of facilities around the world, the men and women of our armed services need to know that we understand and value their contributions to the security of our nation and the well-being of every American," Principi said.

About 4.5 million Americans have already visited the DoD Web site on the Internet, where they signed a simple message: "Dear member of the U.S. Military: Thank you for defending our freedom."

"The Department of Veterans Affairs stands ready to assist our newly deployed troops with a wide range of programs and services when they return home," Principi said. "We all pray that will be soon."

*DefendAmerica.mil* is the Defense Department's official Web site for news on the war on terrorism. The site provides coverage of top national security leaders, while featuring up-to-date photographs, information on weapons and equipment, personality profiles and human-interest features.

*DefendAmerica.mil's* online thank-you note was posted in May 2002, which was Military Appreciation Month.

Veterans wishing to receive e-mail from VA with the latest news releases and updated fact sheets can subscribe at the following Internet address:  
[www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/opalist\\_listserve.cfm](http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/opalist_listserve.cfm).

## PATIENT ADVOCATES and PATIENT SURVEYS

Our Medical Center strives to provide you the best care possible in the most courteous and efficient manner. We appreciate your choosing the Martinsburg VA Medical Center to meet your health care needs and value your comments about your experiences here. We are always open to comments to improve our service to veterans. Patient Advocates Mary Shawyer and Derek Slonaker are available Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., in Room 1A-107, 304-263-0811, Ext. 3068 to assist you with any questions, issues or concerns you may have.

## **National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month March 1-31, 2003**

The National Center for Health  
Promotion and Disease Prevention  
Endorses Participation in National  
Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month.

Colorectal cancer prevention materials  
will assist in the education of  
patients, family and staff.

### References/Credits:

VA National Center for Health Promotion  
and Disease Prevention Point

Duke University

National Cancer Institute

[www.nci.nih.gov/cancerinfo](http://www.nci.nih.gov/cancerinfo)

CDC, National Center for Chronic Disease  
Prevention and Health Promotion

[www.cdc.gov/nccdphp](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp)

Cancer Research and Prevention

Foundation [www.preventcancer.org](http://www.preventcancer.org)

Harvard Center for Cancer Prevention

[www.yourcancerrisk.harvard.edu](http://www.yourcancerrisk.harvard.edu)

VA National Center for Health Promotion  
and Disease Prevention:

[www.nchdpd.med.va.gov](http://www.nchdpd.med.va.gov)

## **TAX SERVICES FOR VETERANS**

Free tax preparation and electronic filing are  
available to inpatients and outpatients of the  
Martinsburg VA Medical Center. This  
program is sponsored by IRS and AARP and  
is available to all low-to-middle income  
taxpayers. All counselors are trained and  
certified by IRS in tax law as well as the  
electronic filing program. This service is  
available EACH THURSDAY till mid-April  
from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. in Room 1D-123 at the  
Medical Center. For more information,  
contact Jackie McDonald, AARP Tax Aide  
at 304-262-8675 or 1-888-227-7669 or Web  
address: [www.aarp.org/taxaide](http://www.aarp.org/taxaide)

## **MARTINSBURG VA MEDICAL CENTER**

### *Important Phone Numbers*

Medical Center	304-263-0811
CPC-1	Ext. 3960/ 3961/ 3962
CPC-2	Ext. 3963/ 3964/ 3965
CPC-3	Ext. 3968/ 3681/ 3664
Automated Prescription Refill	Ext. 4870
(All Hours)	

### **Patient Eligibility**

Mon-Fri 8 am – 4:30 pm	Ext. 3757/ 3758
After 4:30 pm	Ext. 3050

### **Community-Based Outpatient Clinics**

Cumberland, MD	301-724-0061
Hagerstown, MD	301-665-1462
Harrisonburg, VA	540-442-1773
Stephens City, VA	540-869-0600
Franklin, WV	304-358-2355
Petersburg, WV	Ext. 120 304-257-1026

### **Vet Center**

900 Winchester Avenue	304-263-6776
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**Veterans Health Benefits Service Center**  
1-877-222-VETS (8387)

### **Veterans Education Information Hotline**

1-800-442-4551

### **VA Web Site Addresses**

[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

[www.va.gov/vision5](http://www.va.gov/vision5)

[www.va.gov/womenvet](http://www.va.gov/womenvet)

**Veterans' new Web page, containing  
information on veteran services, federal  
and state holidays, military bases/camps,  
as well as computer tips and electronic  
history: [www.gregarpin.com](http://www.gregarpin.com)**